1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



of crabs: *pikea-uri, pikea-nahenahe, pikea-tutu-au, pikea-tura-moa, pikea-paki-maroa,* and *pikea-toetoe.*

Sea urchins (*hatuke*) are plentiful along the coast. Natives crush them between two stones and boil them. In olden days trepangs or bêche-de-mer (*pipiri*) were eaten after their skins had been rubbed off. A big Coelenterata (*otaki*) is said to have been eaten. I saw the natives eat another mollusk known as *takatore-pare.*

Islanders are still fond of small shellfish, *pipipipi-uriuri, pipi-vaka, pipi-ekaeka; pipi-nehenehe, pipi-momoko, ningoningo.* Shells of sea snails are found in great quantities near ancient settlements and in caves.

## HOUSES

Easter Islanders lived in thatched houses, in semi-underground houses, or in caves. All their dwellings were uncomfortable; the low houses were overcrowded, the caves dark and wet. Such indifference to comfort is not astonishing when one remembers that the natives lived mostly out-of-doors and that the houses were shelters for the night or for rainy days only. Scarcity of wood is partly responsible for the crudeness of the huts, but nothing prevented the building of more stone houses of the Orongo type. Though today all the islanders have frame houses, they are small and crowded. A few modern houses are built of stone, but this type is becoming obsolete.

## CAVES

### COASTAL CAVES

The coasts of Easter Island, especially along the west and north, are perforated with caves (*ana*), which have been used by the islanders either as permanent dwellings or as shelters for the night during fishing expeditions. When they are overtaken by darkness far from their homes, the natives go to sleep in the nearest cave.

Thomson, Routledge, and I have excavated the ground of several coastal caves and found hooks, bone needles, and wrought bone fragments, indicating that those caves were once occupied by day and that fishermen used them as workshops. Some caves, especially that of Ovahe, seem to have been arranged for longer occupancy. The entrances are protected by stone walls, and inside are stone platforms on which to sleep. Some of these platforms are covered with a layer of straw—testimony that the natives still sleep there. The largest of these caves is Ana-havea on the south coast.

### INLAND CAVES

The name *hare-kionga* designates inland caves or subterranean lava tubes, where defeated people are said to have taken refuge during wars. That this was the essential purpose of these strange dwellings we do not know, but the

1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



curbs are firmly embedded in the ground, it is difficult to estimate their total height; generally they rise 1 foot above the ground. Their depth underground must be between 30 cm. and 1 meter. The unseen part is generally roughly carved and thicker than the upper part, which has sharp angles and smooth surfaces. The upper face of each slab has 2 or 3 (rarely 4 or 5) cup-shaped depressions. These cavities, in which rafters were inserted, are 5 to 8 cm. deep with a diameter of 2.5 to 5 cm. The distance between them is variable.

The curbstones are embedded to form a complete oval (pl. 3, *A*). In a few houses the end curbs (*pini hare paenga*) are curved (fig. 15, *b*), so that the foundation may be continuous. However, most houses are sharply pointed at the ends with a small space left between the two end curbs.

The number of curbstones composing the foundation depends on the size of the house and the length of the curbs. The large hut seen by La Pérouse had, according to his plan, 70 curbs. Other houses of more modest size had from 15 to 18 curbs.

In the middle of the seaward side is an opening corresponding to a door.

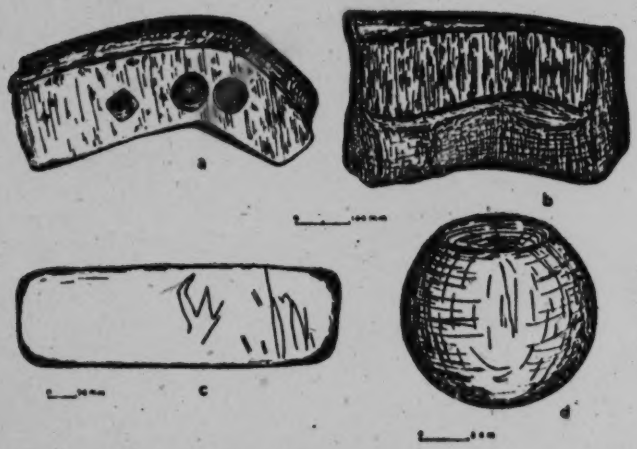


FIGURE 15.—Curbstones and household furniture. *a-b*, corner curbstone of the bird-man's house at Rano-raraku: *a*, top view showing holes for ends of rafters; *b*, side view; 580 mm. long, 290 mm. high, 190 mm. wide; *c*, ground rectangular stone pillow (*ngarua*), with incised figures representing a vulva and a bird without head (a line terminating in a fork incised on the other side), 250 mm. long, 860 mm. wide, 52 mm. thick (B3598); *d*, calabash (*ipu*) for drinking water, 72 mm. high, 85 mm. wide (B3567).

Few stone foundations are seen today because houses with stone foundations were not the most common type. They were the expression of wealth. It was easier and cheaper to stick rafters into the ground, though there was always the danger that rain, running down the slopes of the volcanoes, might penetrate into the house. Also, many foundations have been destroyed both before and after the occupation of the island by Europeans. In time of war a triumphant party would take as booty the curbs of the houses of the de-

1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



362
513

An old man showed Routledge (194, p. 216) how they slept in the huts: "This was parallel to the long axis of the house, the head being towards the door; the old people were in the center in couples and the younger ones in the ends."

## Size of Houses

342

The houses must have varied considerably in size. Bernizet (130, vol. 2, pp. 256-257), after describing one of 300 feet, says: "The small cabins are of the ordinary form; the most of them so very small as not without difficulty to afford room enough for six persons."

The largest house on Easter Island of which dimensions have been recorded is that figured in La Pérouse's atlas (130, vol. 2, p. 256) and reproduced here (fig. 16). This enormous hut, which could easily shelter 200 individuals, was probably a community house (*hare-nui*). Judging by their remains, ancient houses were generally 10 to 15 meters long and 1.5 to 2 meters broad, giving shelter to about 30 persons. The largest house foundation measured is 40 meters long and 4 meters wide. These figures correspond roughly to estimates made by early visitors to the island (186, p. 17; 5, p. 356; 15, vol. 1, p. 55; 146, p. 274).

## Disappearance of Ancient Houses

342
177

In 1877 Pinart (178, p. 238) noticed that most of the huts were made of wood from wrecked ships and in the fashion of European cabins. At that time, few reed houses were to be seen in Hanga-roa. This change in the type of house was caused by the wrecking of a ship loaded with timber from Oregon. Under the guidance of a Danish carpenter, the natives built plank houses 25 feet long and 15 feet wide. Most of the buildings received light through very small doors, but some had windows and windowpanes. The roofs were made of planks or covered with banana leaves or long grass. The floors were of earth or covered with straw. In 1886 "several rough bedsteads and chests" were already in use (215, p. 454).

The small grass huts, which survived until 1917 (208, vol. 1, pl. 10), have now disappeared. The Easter Islanders who were deported to Tahiti early in the twentieth century erected huts in the old native style. However, many details of the structure show pronounced Tahitian influences (7, pl. 9). Modern houses on Easter Island are made of planks imported from Chile, and built on short piles to escape the humidity and the annoyance of rats. They are divided into rooms and provided with heterogeneous furniture from Chile. The old thatch roofs have been replaced by corrugated iron. Near the house is generally a little shed where cooking is done, mostly on small metal stoves imported from Chile. Tepano was the only islander to use stones in the construction of his hut, and was one of the few who slept on the floor.

[362]

1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



### Household Furniture

The furniture in the ancient huts was extremely scanty, consisting of mats spread on the floor, stone pillows (*ngarua*), calabashes for water (fig. 15, *d*), baskets for food, and wooden images or tablets hanging from the thatching. Mats (*moenga*) were made of reed (pl. 2, *C*) and the fine specimens were highly valued. In modern houses, people who have no matress sleep on layers of grass, called *heriki* when used for this purpose. Their ancestors are said to have covered themselves with grass. The square stone pillows (fig. 15, *c*) were often decorated with straight lines or with the stylized representation of the vulva. Such pillows were not used elsewhere in Polynesia where wood was abundant. A single specimen of a carved stone pillow has been found in Hawaii (25, p. 125, fig. 102).

### Community Houses

Wealthy people built special large houses called *hare-nui* to shelter their guests during a feast (*koro*). There must have existed a sort of competition between the feast givers as to who could erect the largest *koro* house. As on Mangareva, they were decorated with images (see p. 262).

### Kitchen Shelters

Tepano assured me, though I could not verify his statement, that the ancient inhabitants of the island sometimes erected simple shelters to protect them from wind and rain. They placed in the ground seven rafters (*oka matua*) whose lower ends were curbed and upper ends tied to a horizontal pole (*hahaga*) supported by two vertical posts (*oka pou*). Horizontal sticks were tied to the rafters; then the whole structure was covered with reeds (*ngaatu*), sugar-cane leaves (*rau toa*), and grass (*mauku*). These easily constructed huts were readily abandoned and were probably analogous to the light structures built around the oven to form a kitchen. The oven was "palisadoed to the windward" (130, vol. 2, p. 256). People enjoyed sitting in front of or around the cooking place, where the men took their meals (87, p. 39).

### Boat Houses

Near the pier of Hanga-roa are some sheds where the islanders keep their boats. With the exception of the thatched roof, nothing in the structure of such sheds is old. The roof, which is supported by stakes set at wide intervals, is composed of transverse sticks between which meager bunches of straw are stuck. The walls are made of piled stones.

### Comparison with Other Polynesian Thatched Houses

The general shape of the Easter Island thatched house resembles the small, low huts with elliptical floor plan of the Tuamotus (in former days) and Rapa. The curving walls formed by bent rafters of Easter Island houses are

8: Behrens T-5 (1721-1722) 1908
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



500 live fowls, which were like those of the Vierländen, this time without any boiled or roast ones, together with many roots, some red, some white, a good lot of potatoes which tasted almost like bread, and which are used by these people in the same way; and some hundreds of sugar-canes, great quantities of *pisang*[1], being Indian figs as large as a cucumber a span in length and of proportionate thickness, with a green rind. When one peels this off [the pulp] tastes like figs, or as sweet as honey: there are sometimes as many as a hundred on a single bunch. The leaf is from two to three feet broad and from six to eight feet in length. It is with these that our first parents should have covered themselves in Paradise after their unfortunate Fall, because it is almost the largest and strongest leaf which one meets with in Morning and Evening lands.

No animals were met with, as far as we penetrated on this occasion, except sundry species of birds; but there may be many other animals farther in the interior of the country, as the natives seemed acquainted with pigs when they saw some on board our ships.

The natives prepare their meals in pots made of clay or earth. Each household appeared to us to have its own.

The houses were from forty to sixty feet [*schuh*] long, six to eight feet [*schuh*] in width, and of similar height, set up on wooden stakes, daubed over with luting and covered in with palm leaves. As regards their subsistence it appears that it must be procured by tillage of the soil, as we saw it everywhere planted and bearing crops. Moreover the fields or lands were all measured off with a cord, and very neatly cultivated. At the time of our visit all their crops were maturing: the fields and trees were in full bearing, and I feel sure that if we had explored this country right through many good things would have been met with, since we were there in just the best season of the year.

No remarkable furniture was found inside their houses, except some red and white coverlets [*decken*] which they often use as apparel, and also for sleeping under. These coverlets felt like silk, to the touch, so that one could almost conclude they had looms by means of which they made them themselves.

These natives were universally blithe and merry, well-built, strong in limb, not exactly slender, yet nimble on their feet; friendly and pleasant in manner, but submissive withal, and also very timid. Most of them, when bringing any object such as

[1] *Pisang* is the Malayan generic term for the banana.

9: Forster T-5 (1774) 1777
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



1774. MARCH. feet high, over which the people had built a round projecting funnel to keep off the wet. We crept on all fours into this opening, and found the inside of the hut perfectly naked and empty, there being not so much as a wisp of straw to lie down upon. We could not stand upright in any part except just in the middle, and the whole place appeared dark and dismal. The natives told us they passed the night in these huts, and we easily conceived their situation to be uncomfortable, especially as we saw so very few of them, that they must be crammed full, unless the generality of the people lie in the open air, and leave these wretched dwellings to their chiefs, or make use of them only in bad weather.

Besides these huts, we observed some heaps of stones piled up into little hillocks, which had one steep perpendicular side, where a hole went under ground. The space within could be but very small, and yet it is probable that these cavities likewise served to give shelter to the people during night. They may, however, communicate with natural caverns, which are very common in the lava currents of volcanic countries. Such caverns are very frequent in Iceland, famous for having been the dwelling-places of the ancient inhabitants. Mr. Ferber, the first mineralogical historian of Vesuvius, has noticed such a subterraneous hole in one of the modern lavas of that mountain. We should have

10: Cooke D-5 (1886) 1899
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



In place of plank floors the bare earth is strewn with dried bulrushes and grass to the depth of several inches, and as this litter is rarely renewed, the result is obvious. Occasionally a bunk may be found knocked up at one end of the single apartment of which the house consists, or, as in the more pretentious houses, a square bedstead may be seen, built of planed, unpainted wood, with a wild attempt at scroll carving about the head and foot boards. Chairs and tables are unknown luxuries.

The same house is often occupied by several families, or by several generations of the same family, but as the individuals composing these are never very numerous there is no overcrowding.

A few of the more ordinary cooking utensils may occasionally be seen, but as a rule the natives, as is generally the case among the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, prepare their food in stone ovens in the following manner: A circular excavation is made in the earth outside of the dwelling, several feet in diameter and a foot or two in depth, which is then neatly lined with a porous stone of some sort. Other stones are loosely laid in, and a quantity of dry wood or brush of any kind, with more stones, piled on. The wood is then set on fire, and, when the stones have become sufficiently heated, the loose ones are taken out, and the brands and cinders removed, leaving the lining of heated stones intact. Over these is then spread a layer of banana, breadfruit, or other large leaves to keep the food from contact with ashes. The food, taro, yams, sweet potatoes, fowl, short, or "long pig," or whatever else there may be, previously prepared for cooking, is then placed on the layer of leaves, piece by piece, until all are in position, when the mound of food is carefully covered over with several thicknesses of large green leaves to prevent any dirt from falling in among the edibles. The heated stones, previously removed, are then placed in position all over the mass and finally a thick layer of fine, dry earth, ashes, and cinders is piled over all, these being for the purpose of retaining the heat. In from two to three or four hours the baking is finished, and, barring the "long pig," perhaps, a more healthful and toothsome method of preparing and cooking food, when superintended by an expert native Samoan *chef*, for example, could not, in the estimation of the writer, who has had opportunities for judging, be devised. The thought suggests itself here that the "clambakes" of our Atlantic States are a feeble imitation of this style of cooking among the islanders.

As wood or solid fuel of any kind is a most rare commodity on Rapa Nui the natives are compelled to use brush, twigs, and trash cast up on their island by the sea, anything, in fact, of an inflammable nature which they can pick up. They even economize the dried droppings of the cattle, as the Arab does those of his camel, for this purpose, and I saw great basketfuls of these carefully stowed away in their houses for future use.

They have no fixed time for eating, and while their *mess*, as may be

15:Routledge E-5 (1914-1915) 1919
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2



to obtain the painted slabs within, but most are in fair, and some in perfect, preservation. The form of construction suitable to the low ground has perhaps been tried here and abandoned, for some of the foundation-stones, pierced with the holes to support the superstructure of stick and grass, are built into the existing dwellings. The present buildings (fig. 104) are well adapted to such a wind-swept spot; they are made of stone laminæ, with walls about 6 feet thick; the inside walls are generally lined with vertical slabs, and horizontal slabs form the roof.

The greater number are built at the back into rising ground, and their sides and top are covered with earth; the natives call them not "haré," or houses, but "ana," or caves. Where space permits it, the form is boat-shaped, but some have been adapted to natural contours.[1] The dwellings vary in shape and size, from 52 feet by 6 feet to 8 feet by 4 feet; the height within varies from 4 feet to over 6 feet, but it is the exception to be able to stand upright. In some cases they open out of one another, and not unfrequently there is a hatch between two through which food could be passed. The doorway, with its six foot of passage, is just large enough to admit a man. (Into each of them, armed with ends of candles, we either crawled on hands and knees, or wriggled like serpents, according to our respective heights.) The slabs lining the wall, which are just opposite the doorway, and thus obtain a little light, are frequently painted; some of them have bird and others native designs, but perhaps the most popular is a European ship, sometimes in full sail, and once with a sailor aloft in a red shirt (fig. 105). Inside the houses we found the flat, sea-worn boulders which are used as pillows and often incised with rough designs; there were also a few obsidian spear heads, or mataa, and once or twice sphagnum from the crater, which was used for caulking boats, and also as a sponge to retain fresh water when at sea. Outside many of the doors are small stone-lined holes, which we cleared out and examined. They measure roughly rather under 2 feet across by some 15 inches in depth. Our guides first told us that they were "ovens," but, as no ash was found, it seems probable that their second thoughts were right, and they were used to contain stores.

[1] An accurate large scale plan of the village was made by Lieutenant D. R. Ritchie, R.N., and every house was measured and described by the Expedition.